Resolution #4: In Support of Malheur Enterprise

Submitted by: Region 10 Director Donald W. Meyers
Resolutions Committee Recommendation: Favorable

WHEREAS, the Malheur Enterprise, under the leadership of Editor Les Zaitz, has been covering the actions of the Malheur County economic development department and its director, Oregon State Rep. Greg Smith, holding the department to account;

WHEREAS the Enterprise's coverage, upholding the highest standards of SPJ's Code of Ethics, has angered Smith, who claims that he and his employees are being "harassed" solely because journalists are asking questions about their official actions and seeking to hold them accountable to the public;

WHEREAS Smith has not merely complained about what he perceives as negative coverage but has taken steps toward silencing the Enterprise, starting with an attempt to have the paper investigated by the sheriff's office for "telephonic harassment;"

WHEREAS the county sheriff found the allegation baseless, so Smith changed tactics and is encouraging local businesses to boycott the Enterprise and cripple it, a highly ironic act for a man whose job is supposedly to promote local business; and

WHEREAS such conduct is typical of totalitarian regimes and is particularly abhorrent when practiced by someone who has taken an oath to support and follow both the U.S. and Oregon state constitutions, which both contain provisions guaranteeing freedom of the press as a check on government abuse;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists, sitting in convention on September 7, 2019, in San Antonio, Texas, strongly condemns Smith's actions against the Malheur Enterprise and urges him to cease further attacks aimed at silencing the Malheur Enterprise by legal or economic threats.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Society of Professional Journalists extends its wholehearted support to Les Zaitz and his staff for boldly seeking truth and reporting it, acting independently and serving their community by keeping government accountable.